



**ABOVE:** 2nd Lt. Jonathan Browning, left, and Sgt. Jack Ramthun, both 20th Engineer Battalion, Fort Hood, Texas, make calculations to use explosives to cut steel, May 7. **RIGHT:** 1st Lt. Matthew Textor, top, and Sgt. Dustin Hughes, middle, both 65th Engineer Battalion, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, descend from Sapper Tower as Pfc. Ashley Haushild, 5th Engineer Battalion, bottom, holds the safety rope, May 7.

Story and photos by Luke Waack  
GUIDON Staff

**A**fter 52 hours of engineer challenges requiring muscle-wrenching, rain-soaked exertion, little or no sleep and miles of running, Capt. Jason Winkelmann and 2nd Lt. Joel Groves, both from the 8th Engineer Battalion, 36th Engineer Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas, placed first in the 2008 Best Sapper Competition, May 8.

From more than a dozen Army units, 25 two-man teams arrived on Fort Leonard Wood to compete for the title of Best Sappers, May 6-8, waging war on challenge after challenge and testing their abilities as engineers and Soldiers.

**Toughest Parts**

“The toughest parts were the physical events. The terrain here at Fort Leonard Wood is very challenging,” Winkelmann said.

“I was on the second-place team last year. This year, the competition went really well for us. We started training back in February, and it paid off. We felt confident the whole way through,” Winkelmann said.

“I had a new teammate this year. I picked him because he was young and motivated,” Winkelmann said.

Winkelmann’s teammate thinks holding the title of Best Sapper will take some getting used to.

“It is really surreal and exciting,” said Groves, who is very familiar with Fort Leonard Wood.

“I graduated Engineer Basic Officer Leadership Course, Aug. 7, 2007. I went to Ranger School right out of EBOLC. When I got to Fort Hood, they wanted me to compete here, so they sent me to Sapper school. I just finished,” Groves said.

**What lies ahead**

With the challenge of the Best Sapper competition behind him, Groves is ready for what lies ahead.

“Deployment is next for me. I’m looking forward to being a platoon leader. We’re going to be doing route clearance,” Groves said.

The United States Army Engineer School commandant, Brig. Gen. Gregg Martin presented Winkelmann and Groves with their awards — including the Army Commendation Medal, certificates of achievement and a trophy — and spoke about their accomplishment, the Best Sapper competition and what it means for the Army at large.

“These guys have put themselves in the Sapper Leader Course, put themselves through the crucible of the absolute best training as a combat engineer /Sapper, in the entire United States Army. So their leadership, their combat engineer skills and their technical skills are raised and honed to the absolute pinnacle. They will take that and apply it in their squads, platoons, companies and battalions to bring the entire unit to another level,” Martin said.

**Other winners**

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Behnkendorf and 1st Lt. Shawn Hogan, 20th Engineer Brigade, Fort Bragg, N.C. took second place.

Maj. Stephen Peterson and Capt. Daniel Taphorn, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 31st Engineer Battalion, won third place.



**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:** Staff Sgt. Scott Barker, Sapper Leader Course instructor, right, gives Sgt. 1st Class Michael Behnkendorf, left, with 1st Lt. Shawn Hogan on his back, final instructions on the Sapper Tower repel at Training Area 147, May 7. Behnkendorf and Hogan, both from the 20th Engineer Brigade, Fort Bragg, N.C., won second place in the Best Sapper Competition. **TOP LEFT:** 1st Lt. Nathan Magee, 562nd Engineer Company, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash., navigates the Fort Leonard Wood obstacle course, Training Area 102, May 7. **TOP CENTER:** Maj. Stephen Peterson, left, and Capt. Daniel Taphorn, both 31st Engineer

Battalion, place live explosives on a tree to knock it down and form a road-block at Training Area 26 B, May 7. Peterson and Taphorn won third place in the Best Sapper Competition. **ABOVE:** Staff Sgt. Timothy Knight, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas, crosses the finish line of the poncho raft-build and float challenge at Training Area 250, May 6. **LEFT:** After hours of running, marching and swimming with little or no sleep, Soldiers take advantage of down time. Pfc. James Conley, 4th Engineer Battalion, 555th Engineer Brigade, Fort Carson, Colo., catches a few minutes of rest at Range 26 B, May 7.